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ABSTRACT

Some tentative conclusions based on an urban university community planning program deal with the characteristics of university communities, special problems engendered by these characteristics, and methods to combat them. The problems discussed center around planning, land acquisition, zoning and community relations. (HH)

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# PLANNING AND ACQUISITION PROBLEMS FOR A GROWING UNIVERSITY

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I think it appropriate that I begin my remarks by providing you with some background on the framework within which they have been developed. I have not been and I am not speaking as a student of university planning or of urban planning generally. I have had the privilege (at times, it seems like a curse) of participating in the planning of a specific urban university community for about 4 years. It is about this activity that I want to speak, stating some generalities -- call them hypotheses if you wish -- that I suggest may have more widespread application. In a sense, therefore, I am stating some tentative conclusions based on a 4-year case study.

As will become clear shortly, I am speaking not only of the University but of a somewhat broader entity which I prefer to call the University community. Urban universities particularly have been guilty over the years of planning in too narrow a context and, as a result, have found themselves constantly complaining about the University being forced to exist in an inappropriate community setting. By placing the planning in a broader context it is hoped that both the University and the community may more appropriately serve the needs of their constitutiencies.

Let me begin by citing some characteristics of university communities that set them apart from communities generally. Following this, I should like to comment upon the special problems these characteristics engender and, finally, I should like to make a few remarks about possible devices that may be employed to combat these problems.

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The most obvious characteristic of university communities is, of course, the dominance of a single institutional employer. Because of its nature, this employer dominates not only the economic or vocational lives, but also the social and cultural lives of its employee-citizens. I suppose it is in a sense this all-encompassing effect of the institution upon its members that we have in mind when we speak of the University as a community of scholars. But few universities today exist in the idyllic ivory tower setting the community of scholars phrase tends to connote. I wonder if they ever did? In any case, as I stated earlier, we are unable to plan wisely for either the University or its "citizens" if we limit our attention to the present or proposed boundaries of the campus.

A second distinctive characteristic of the university community is the makeup of its citizenry. The community contains at least three distinct classes of citizens, the professors, the supporting staff -- secretaries, laboratory workers and the like -- and the students. I suppose we could include a fourth class comprised of those citizens not directly connected with the University but who prefer to live in a university setting. The first class, i.e. the professors, are more or less permanent citizens although the current mobility of faculty seems to suggest less rather than more. They are predominately family types desiring neighborhoods with all the amenities (perhaps even more amenities) generally expected by most mature families. They expect to be treated as settled, that is as non-transient members of the community.

The second group contains both permanent and transient members of the community. As a group they probably are less attracted to living in

the immediate vicinity of the campus than either the first or third class.

Even when one includes spouses and children, however, the settled or permanent element of the community is a minority to the transient element -- the students. And, despite all our fine phrases about the community of scholars, student-faculty interaction, etc., there is a strong desire to keep the classes separate outside the campus boundaries. The reasoning is understandable and, I suspect, can be found primarily in the various explanations of the generation gap -- but it seriously complicates the process of wise community planning. In an earlier era the problems were resolved by housing the bulk of the transients in university dormitories where an in loco parentis style of authority could deal firmly with any problems that arose.

Today's students, and to an even greater degree tomorrow's students, will not accept this solution. They desire to be in and of the community with all the freedoms and, we hope, all the responsibilities this entails. But as transients, and as young transients at that, they can be expected to show only limited concern for such community institutions as schools, tot playgrounds, etc. They have only limited interest in industrial activity and their concern for commercial development leads to a strange balance if judged against that to be found in most non-university family neighborhoods.

The type of housing desired by the transient element differs markedly from that of most members of the other two groups. Students show little or no interest in detached housing, except as these can be converted to rooming houses, fraternities or sororities. They generally are not affluent and, because they derive many amenities through their university status, they often are willing

to accept rather spartan quarters. Even for married students, their taste in apartments is more spartan than that of their elders or many of their contemporaries outside the university. The result is that we find a ready market for housing of almost any style, even that which in other conditions might be considered substandard, so long as it is convenient to the university.

A third characteristic of the university community is the almost constant threat of further land acquisition by the university itself as it attempts to satisfy what must appear to the surrounding citizens as an insatiable appetite for land. The combination of this factor with the strong demand for housing encourages land-holding for speculative purposes. This speculative activity tends to discourage the large developer interested in permanent projects from entering the community and, as a result, new development consists primarily of a proliferation of small apartment complexes aimed at fast recovery in an almost certain market situation. Attempts to discourage such developments are fraught with problems and seldom succeed because of the ubiquitious counter argument that growing student populations require more housing and any new housing should be viewed as a legitimate attempt to meet the need.

In any case, all of this activity surrounding a growing university leads to an exceptionally strong market for land. Zoning administrators are hard pressed to hold the line against economic forces that often run counter to expressed community desires to maintain a balanced community.

So much for characteristics. I am sure this list could be expanded but I think these general characteristics serve the purpose of helping to establish the nature of the problems I want to discuss. Let me turn now to some of the

planning problems to be found in this kind of community.

Obviously, from the nature of my earlier remarks, one of the most pressing problems in a physical sense is the competing forces vying for a limited land area. Perhaps of greater overall significance is the difficulty of developing a reasonably complete, well-documented academic plan. Faculty members are prone to criticize architects and planners for lack of foresight -- yet their failures often result from failure on the part of faculty to clearly delineate the academic activities that physical structures are supposed to serve. As a result, we all too often find ourselves fitting programs to buildings rather than vice versa.

But even with a well-designed academic statement, one of the more serious problems of growing universities, which incidentally I am going to assume are large universities, is to insure the ease of interaction among representatives of various disciplines or subcommunities. Most American universities have long since passed the point where sufficient interaction among scholars can be expected to result from casual meetings on the mall, in the faculty club, or in the hallways going to and from class. Nevertheless, we struggle valiantly to locate disciplines in close proximity to those with whom they expect greatest interaction. The struggle should continue, but the premise that proximity yields interaction is open to question in the large university. We assume, erronously I believe, that location in the same building yields the kind of interaction we desire. I say erronously because chance meetings between faculty on the fifth and twelfth floors of a tower structure probably are not much more likely than those of faculty located in separate structures several

hundred yards apart. In any case, I believe we must design, both academically and physically, for the interaction that many of us assume takes place casually on the smaller college campus.

One of the design requirements is to enable the professor, student, or visitor to move quickly and easily about the campus without dependence upon the automobile. At a university such as Minnesota, this means an alternative form of mechanized transportation since distances are too great to rely solely upon walking. The large universities of the 1980's, in my opinion, will find some form of internal transit as essential as sidewalks were in the 1920's and 1930's.

But we must go further. The automobile has been a prime claimant on the scarce land I spoke of earlier. It has also been a prime factor in the deterioration of neighborhoods surrounding the campus. Congestion resulting from traffic flows to and from the campus and auto storage on neighborhood streets have been responsible for the flight of many residents from the campus neighborhood to the suburbs. If we are to depend on the auto, we must plan our streets and highways for convenient traffic movement and make provision for adequate storage on the periphery of the campus area. A more practical approach is to plan for mass transit in order to reduce substantially our dependence upon the auto and its accompanying problems.

Another approach to reducing the effects of the auto is to plan more effectively for housing within the immediate campus community. This requires cooperative action between the University and private developers since it is likely that most of the housing for all classes of university citizens will be developed

outside direct university control. What action might be appropriate?

A first need is for the university to clearly state its own intentions for land ownership. At Minnesota, our Regents have established boundaries for intended expansion of the Universityto assure private developers of "safe" areas for investment. This policy is not without its problems, activities of speculators within the proposed boundary and lack of funds to complete acquisition within a specified time schedule are two of them, but it is superior to our earlier policy of uncertainty. I should admit that the power of eminent domain makes such a policy easier to implement than would be the case otherwise.

This in itself is not adequate to bring about wise land use outside the campus. The economics of the land market which I alluded to earlier, makes the accumulation of large parcels of land for planned development difficult and, in some cases, almost impossible without urban renewal. Zoning requirements, traditionally applied, generally are not strong enough to overcome the economic pressures resulting from a strong rental market and expanding commercial activity. The result is frustration both for responsible developers interested in building high-density living units for students and young staff, and for settled faculty members attempting to preserve established single-family neighborhoods from encroachment by rooming house operators and the 3-story walkup apartment complex.

What is needed, it seems to me, is greater recongition that the university community is in many ways a unique community. Trying to develop this community within zoning laws designed to deal with other city problems may be a major reason why neighborhoods surrounding urban universities tend

to deteriorate. Could these problems be prevented by treating the university community as a special zoning district? I don't know, but let me suggest some of the things that should be attempted.

Rather than relying upon traditional zoning districts, we should make greater provision for planned development of large segments of the community. Such provision should require compatability between university and community planning. By so doing, we might provide for high density dormitory or apartment housing on the periphery of university land without having to insure that all peripheral land could become high density. By meeting the demand for student housing within easy walking distance we might stand a better chance of preserving single-family faculty neighborhoods somewhat further removed but still within the community. The commercial areas could be planned as a part of the total housing plan -- perhaps integrated with housing rather than separated as happens in traditional zoning.

Such planned development would require strict control on land use that often would run counter to short-run economic forces. But is this necessarily bad? If economic forces as currently modified fail to give us the kind of community we want, shouldn't we experiment with new institutional devices? Furthermore, if experience tells us that excessive pursuit of <u>short-term</u> economic interests leads to progressive deterioration that, in many cases, is correctable in the long-run only by bulldozer-type urban renewal activity -- and I suggest experience does tell us this -- then let's attack the problem at its source rather than wait until conditions are so bad that there is no alternative to the bulldozer.

What devices might we employ to gain community support for new and imaginative solutions? First, there must be better understanding of the situation.

Few people fully appreciate the magnitude of a modern university. The University of Minnesota has a population of students, faculty, and staff of about 50,000. As we look ahead to 1980, our own growth plus that of neighboring institutions will yield a university community -- residents and commuters -- well in excess of 100,000. Daily trips to and from the University community will be equivalent to the current number of trips to the central business district of St. Paul. Measured by number of employees, we are the state's second or third largest employer. The buying power generated by this work force and by 40,000 students is no small factor in the economic life of the community. Thus, a first step is to get appreciation both by the university and the community at large of the fact that the university community is indeed a city within a city.

Second, there must develop a joint concern for the welfare of this community among the university, its immediate neighbors, and the business and civic community at large. At Minnesota we, and five institutional neighbors, have created a nonprofit corporation, the University Community Development Corporation, to aid in giving voice to this concern and, hopefully, to facilitate action. Membership is open to any concerned individual or organization, and leadership is provided by business and civic leaders as well as by the institutions.

Third, the University itself must engage in cooperative and responsible planning. In their own way, universities themselves are guilty of land use

sprawl for which we condemn suburban communities. We too must search constantly for ways to achieve more efficient land use even when this requires removal of structures with significant sentimental value but which have long since outlived their educational usefulness. At Minnesota, we are attempting to develop a concept of campus renewal involving selective removal of structures in order to gain a more cohesive and efficient campus suited to modern needs. If we are to seek changes in the community outside the campus boundaries, we would be less than responsible if we cling blindly to the past on the campus.

I have not attempted in these brief comments to present a catalogue of the planning problems in a growing university. Neither have I attempted to elaborate in detail those problems that I did choose to discuss.

What I have attempted is to provide an overview of the complex of issues facing a growing university and its surrounding community. My theme, if I had one, is that major conflicts arise primarily over issues of land use. The resolution of these issues will be achieved only when there is more complete understanding of the needs of both the university and the surrounding community. When this understanding is supplemented by cooperative planning, the University and the community may achieve a degree of harmony unknown in most university communities today.